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THE PROJECT METHOD IN BEGINNING LATIN¹

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The educational press and platform in the past five years have abounded in discussions of what is variously called the project, the problem, or tautologically the problem-project. Originally developed under this name as a method of handling vocational and motor subjects, it early attracted the attention of scientific students of education; and numerous attempts have been made to interpret it in psychological terms, to determine its relation to the educational process as a whole, and to apply its principles in the teaching of subjects other than those in which it has developed. It is the purpose of this paper to see how far the project method is legitimately applicable to beginning Latin, and to sketch the leading types of project which are of use in teaching Latin in the ninth grade.

You are all no doubt familiar with the project as applied in such studies as manual training, agriculture, and home economics. Hence I shall omit illustration, and proceed to summarize from recent educational discussions² the principles governing the project. It is "a purposeful act on the part of the child"; "a problem the solution of which results in an object, knowledge," or experience "of such value to the worker as to make the labor seem worth while to him." It is a unitary act with a practical end. It utilizes previous knowledge, and itself results in an advance in the child's knowledge or skill. An important feature of this utilization of previous knowledge is that the formulation of the project in the

¹ An address delivered before the foreign language section of the Southwestern Ohio Teachers' Association at Cincinnati, October 29, 1920.

² Most of the citations here given are credited without further detailed notice to Kilpatrick, "The Problem-Project Attack in Organization, Subject-Matter, and Teaching," *Proceedings of the National Education Association*, 1918, pp. 528-31; or to Bramon, *The Project Method in Education*, Badger, 1919.

pupil's own mind is both imaginative and systematic, in that he conceives his end, assembles the resources with which that end is to be attained, and then works according to specifications. Finally; the product is subject to verification in an objective manner; in other words, it has a social as well as an individual value.

Not all of these features are to be found fully developed in every project, but these are the salient characteristics of it. I think I need not dilate to a body of modern teachers upon the value of such a point of view in education. Pestalozzi has not done his work in vain. If "the purposeful act is the typical unit of the worthy life"; if school life is life itself to the child and for his time, as well as preparation for the life after school; if even "the moral value of persistent attack upon a task in itself irksome" is dependent upon the consciousness of a worth-while achievement; then we must regard the project-attitude as a major essential of the educational process.

Some selection of the types of project is necessary before we can profitably discuss their application in Latin. These types, according to Kilpatrick, are four. (1) The *constructive* type, which aims to embody in outward form some projected idea, is scarcely applicable to Latin at all, but belongs rather in the motor subjects. There is a close psychological parallelism, however, between it and the most prominent type of project in beginning Latin, as I shall show. The other three types are applicable in varying degrees at various stages of Latin with a varying proportion of pupils. (2) The *puzzle* type aims to straighten out some intellectual difficulty. (3) The *aesthetic* type aims at the enjoyment of some worthy experience. (4) The *learning* type aims to acquire some item of knowledge or skill which the pupil values either for its own sake (a near approximation to the aesthetic type), or for its later use to some practical end valued by the pupil.

Now the bearing of these three types on Latin will be promptly recognized. As for the learning type, most pupils like to show their skill in inflection and translation; though, except for the limited few who are not the dominant factor in the smaller high schools, this pride of skill has little ulterior value, but is merely a transitory display of social vanity before the teacher and the class.

It is a fire, in which the iron of Latin attainment may be shaped indeed, but only while it is hot. Not so with the aesthetic and puzzle types. We may tentatively classify the translation of an isolated Latin sentence as a problem of the puzzle type (though with an important modification which I shall discuss later), while the translation of even the briefest paragraph of connected Latin superadds to this the aesthetic type of problem. The aesthetic project involves too much complication of psychological attitude for inclusion in the limits of this paper, and is moreover based on the technique of the interpretation of the single sentence. Hence I shall confine myself to the project as it relates to the sentence in beginning Latin.

Let us now notice a point much insisted upon in most discussions of the project: namely, that it results in a product which is social in its character, and which will be recognized by others with some degree of objectivity as having that character of unity and finality, of goodness in itself, that quality of "there-you-are-ness," which enables it to issue from the mint of the pupil's own constructive imagination and pass current in the marts of his world. Such a quality attaches clearly to the testing of seed corn or the making of a cherry pie; but it is not so easy to see how it attaches to many of the "stunts" required of the pupil in a beginning Latin class. Hence the question arises here, In just what sense is Latin essentially social?

The answer to this question is to be found in the nature of language as distinct from the state, the workshop, or the mart. Society is the unity of the more-than-one. The state is the unity of the plural; while the workshop or the market place is the unity of the *ego* with the potentially plural. In contrast to this, language is essentially the unity of the dual. All speech is the address of the *ego* to the *tu*; it involves two rôles, and two only—the speaker and the hearer. The multiplication of hearers into an audience, as in a class, may add interest and emotional exaltation, but it does not alter the structure of speech. The primary aim of the speaker is still to make himself understood; that of the hearer, to understand. Any other individual in society is appropriately termed the "third person," who, while he is often the topic of

discourse in the sentence, is not a factor in its structure, since he does not speak, and we are not aiming to make him understand. It follows that the project is impossible in Latin unless the pupil in trying to interpret a Latin sentence consciously pictures some other person as saying something which it is "up to him" to understand; or, in trying to frame a Latin sentence, consciously imagines some other person who must be made to understand what he is trying to say. We might indeed introduce to our first-year class at the outset two characters who are to be present at every recitation: *Romanus*, who understands no English, and *Barbarus*, who understands no Latin. The pupil is always to be interpreter between these two; and the social criterion of his success is whether or not they understand, and feel that the pupil's version is clear and free from disturbing awkwardness of expression.

It is this indispensable duality of language that differentiates the problem in beginning Latin from the purely intellectual or puzzle type of project. The pure puzzle is predominantly individual, and perhaps because of this fact it is apt to seem trivial. When we have solved a puzzle, we say: "I have it!" When we grasp the meaning of a speaker, we say: "I get you!" Now one of the chief reasons for the stiff and silly translations too often offered in our classes lies in the fact that the pupil does not visualize *Romanus* as the speaker of the Latin sentence, and then in turn make himself the utterer of the same thought to the English-speaking *Barbarus* in his own vernacular. Hence he is merely solving a puzzle, and his only criterion of success is the teacher's authority; whereas it should be found in the socialization of his own imagination. For the perennial query to the teacher, "Is this right?" the pupil should come to ask *Barbarus* (or *Romanus*, as the case may be), "Do you get me?" Ideally this calls for the direct method; but there are two insuperable obstacles to this in most schools: it requires more time than the majority of pupils will actually give to Latin; and few teachers have the necessary range and readiness of vocabulary. Some Latin conversation will help materially; connected discourse (of a very simple type at first) will help more; for the rest, if we never forget the social, dual, reciprocal nature of language, and constantly make the pupil himself

a responsible interpreter between Romanus and Barbarus, we set before him the direct social aim that is essential to project-work.

We establish then at the outset two major types of problem confronting the pupil as interpreter: the first, in which his task is to grasp the entire sentence in Latin and restate it in English for Barbarus; the second, in which his task is to take a sentence already framed in English (preferably by the pupil himself, or, failing that, by the author of his text) and make it clear to Romanus in Latin. In either case the crux of the problem lies in the fact that the feel of the sentence as it comes to or from Romanus is dependent on the inflectional signs. It follows that if the project method is applicable in Latin at all as a constant and major method, it must be applicable to inflection. If we cannot get the pupil to make the inflection of a Latin word a project of his own, which he attacks with the definite design of using it in bilingual interpretation, we might as well give up the project method in Latin once for all; admit that Latin offers little or no field for self-activity to the usual type of pupil; plead guilty to all the indictments against our subject as a mechanical one devoid of native interest and remote from reality; and abdicate in favor of the pig club.

I am not ready to abdicate. I believe that Latin is good and wholesome for the majority if not all of the pupils in the high school; that it offers for most of them as much field for the purposeful project as any other subject; and that the place of this project is appropriately to be found in inflection, which at first sight seems to be the most arbitrary, artificial, and mechanical of all the exercises used in the Latin class.

The inflection of a Latin word, e.g., *puella*, cannot become a social project so long as the pupil thinks of *puellās* merely as the "accusative plural of *puella*"; because this association is not apt to be felt as contributing directly to the pupil's social aim as interpreter between Romanus and Barbarus. Nor will he be much nearer to a purposeful project—perhaps farther away, indeed—if he thinks, "*puellās* means 'girls,'" as so many of our books have it; because there are dozens of inappropriate ways in which he may use the form "girls." The Latin form will function in its proper way in interpretation only if he thinks, on seeing or hearing it, "Some

one does something to the girls." Each case has its own prevailing skeleton sentence-meaning of this nature, which the teacher had better work out for himself. The following is only suggestive:

"A nominative is or does something."

"Some one does something to an accusative." (The accusative after a preposition will take care of itself.)

"Something happens to the advantage or disadvantage of a dative."

"Something comes from an ablative, or is done with an ablative, or happens in an ablative (or locative)." Probably it is well to add to the three original ablative uses a fourth: "Something is done by (*ab*) an ablative person."

"Hey, there, Mr. Vocative!"

Although the meaning of the genitive is easier to understand, it is more difficult to phrase a key-meaning for it, because it does not in itself directly require a verb to complete the sentence feeling. Often it seems best to put it with a governing noun and translate the two together: *libri puellae* = "the girl's books"; *pars puellarum* = "some of the girls," etc.

In oral declension, these skeleton sentences (substituting the English equivalent of the Latin word under declension for the name of the case in which it is put) should be given with the case-form; though for the sake of conciseness it may be omitted in written exercises, provided the teacher is satisfied from frequent oral drill that the pupil thinks it. Every possible variation should be introduced that will forestall mere memoriter recital of the paradigm. Thus the order of the cases should be varied, and the pupil should learn to expect at any point a call for a brief Latin sentence employing the form just given. When the immediate purpose of the inflection is the translation or framing of a specific Latin sentence, only the case and number specified should be called for. Declension for its own sake should never occur, nor should isolated phrases ("of the girls" etc.) ever be permitted, since they are so apt to be misleading that they defeat the very purpose of inflection.

There is another essential feature of the project which we have not yet discussed, but which must be constantly kept in mind if inflection is to be not a matter of rote memory, but a real project.

This is the requirement that the project shall systematically utilize previous knowledge. It is indispensable to the educational value of the constructive project that the pupil shall first clearly formulate his aim; that he shall so marshal his resources for solution as to mark out a clear and apt procedure; and that he shall then work according to the specifications which he himself has laid down, to reach a definite and verifiable result. Now I contend that inflection is closely akin to the constructive type of project, in that a Latin word is almost always inflected according to a conceptual method, and that the aim and the method of solution can be clearly and economically formulated preliminary to the actual inflection of the word.

I would teach this systematic habit of procedure by requiring every paradigm, whether oral or written, to have a heading, stating specifically what is proposed to be done, and utilizing the vocabulary information about the word for the purpose of finding the stem (as determining the declension or conjugation), which is then stated as the final item of the heading. The word must then be inflected in harmony with the stem as thus specified. The complete project inflection then of *puella*, for example, would differ from its mere memoriter inflection, first, in its conceptual heading, and second, in the attachment to each form of a skeleton sentence or phrase giving the key to the use of the form in a sentence. It would go somewhat as follows:

Heading: states problem, finds and states stem.	Declension of $\left\{ \begin{array}{ll} \textit{puella} & \textit{puella}/e F. \\ = "girl": \text{stem } \textit{puellā} \end{array} \right.$
Body of paradigm: gives solution according to specifications in heading.	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{n. sing. } \textit{puella} = "a girl" (\text{is or does something}); \\ \text{pl. } \textit{puellae} = "girls" (\text{are or do something}); \\ \text{etc., through all the cases.} \end{array} \right.$

Of course this is merely a suggested form, and is subject to infinite variation; whether because of the different structure of case, degree, mood, tense, participial, and periphrastic forms, or because of the varying methods of texts and teachers in the treatment of base or stem, of inflection vowel, of termination or grammar

sign, of degree suffixes, and of tense signs and auxiliaries. Hence I shall not attempt to show you in detail how I would handle the various types of paradigm. After all, the project-method is more a matter of educational principle than of schoolroom devices. After the principle is once mastered as a habit of thinking, so that the pupils frame to themselves vocabulary forms and stem clearly before trying to inflect, and after inflection immediately apply the form in its appropriate sentence context, the preliminary procedure may be condensed or left implicit.

I believe that the project point of view is not inconsistent with thorough and frequent drill, provided the drill be so conducted that the pupil at every moment sees in it a direct bearing upon his daily problem as interpreter between Romanus and Barbarus. In such drill it is economical to make the inflection of the word in its entirety the typical thing; since it is the keystone of an arch whose sides are the understanding and the utterance of Latin speech. There are however three other types of Latin project involved in interpretation in which inflection functions directly indeed, but incidentally only, as a detail in the solution of the specific interpretative problem confronting the pupil. Two of these are in translation, the third in composition.

In the interpretation of a Latin sentence the pupil is confronted with a problem in which the chain of association is the reverse of that ordinarily observed in formal inflection. That is, he is to recognize an oblique form, and to interpret it in terms of sentence structure. A very common blunder here—almost inevitable if the pupil is left to himself, and often encouraged unfortunately by the teacher—is to attack first the problem of word-meaning. This often gives a false clue, and consequently should be reserved until the pupil has identified and interpreted the form. Given for example the following sentence (from a story, "Julia and Her Dog Fido"): *Canem amat, et ille dominam suam amat.* On the principle of the systematic use of previous knowledge, the pupil should not first look for the general meaning of *canem*, which he may or may not know, but should notice and interpret the inflectional sign *m*, which he does know. His solution then is: "*Canem* is an accusative masculine or feminine singular, and suggests that

someone does something to *canem*, whoever that is." The next word solves the problem of what the person does to *canem*; the context will have settled the question who the person is that loves *canem*. This is the commonest type of interpretative project. Its nature as a problem is clear, its aim definite and functional if the interpretative function of the pupil is kept before his mind; and its realization brings the consciousness of success in that the sentence when completed is felt as making sense to Barbarus.

Another problem subsidiary to this occurs when the pupil does not know or cannot recall the meaning of *canem*. The mechanical trial-and-error procedure, to which the pupil is likely to resort in default of systematic training, is to look in the vocabulary for something approximating *canem*. Sometimes this brings results; very often it involves considerable outlay of time and energy with no adequate reward, but with much discouraging fatigue; occasionally it gives the most grotesque mistranslations—as when the present writer, while studying Vergil in the academy, translated, *Lacrimas dilectae pelle Creusaē*: "You are weeping on the hide of your beloved Creusa!"

The remedy for this is again a resort to the project principle of the systematic application of previous knowledge. The pupil knows that every inflected word is given in the vocabulary under a standard finding-form, which I find it convenient to call the rubric form. He knows too that in nouns this rubric is the nominative singular; and that *canem*, being an accusative, will not be found in the vocabulary. His initial step then is to restore the rubric form, and he must not be encouraged to resort to the vocabulary until he knows exactly what to look for. Sometimes this will be a choice amongst two or three possible rubrics; but they must all be in mind as definite possibilities. In looking for *canem*, he will first see that it must be masculine or feminine, and of the third or (much less probably) fifth declension. In both these the probable nominative sign is *s*. He must consequently reconstruct the nominative as *canis* (or possibly *canēs*), and look for that. This procedure can be put in written form for inspection and criticism as follows:

Problem: To find *canem* in the vocabulary.

First step (analysis and classification): *cane/m* is ac. M-F sing.; stem *cani* (or *canē*).

Second step (making of rubric): *cani+s > canis* or *canēs*. (Stem *canē* would also give *canēs*).

Third step (application and verification): The word is found in the vocabulary and declined as shown above for *puella*, but only in the form specified in First Step. If the ac. sing. when made is identical with the form found, and makes the sense already determined upon for the sentence, the verification is complete.

The fourth type of Latin project is that of turning the English sentence into Latin. This is admittedly the most difficult and irksome of all tasks expected of the Latin pupil. I need not enter here into the psychology of it, to show why it must be so; I shall only suggest that the project-principle requires that the sentences used for this purpose should if possible be of the pupil's own framing, addressed directly to the imaginary Romanus of the classroom. They should also be of so simple a character that the pupil can himself determine, or can be shown by the class, whether they make sense in Latin or not; otherwise we shall not have a socially testable product.

In the composition project the pupil must keep constantly in mind that Romanus is going to infer his meaning primarily from the inflectional signs, and that these will have to be determined by sentence structure. His first step then is to break up the sentence into its elements, and to determine how each of them fits into the sentence. His next will be to specify the forms required by the constructions already indicated. Incidentally, it is well for him to number them in the appropriate Latin order, and attack them in that order when he comes to write the Latin. He now has a set of specifications as a basis on which to apply the inflection project in making his forms.

Taking an easy sentence as an example, the analysis will proceed as follows:

First step: The girl / is leading / the dog.

 subject verb object

Second step: n. sing. 3 sing. ac. sing.

Word order: 1 3 2

The pupil then proceeds to apply the inflection project to the three elements in the order of the Latin, adopting the first element without further ado, since it is clearly to be in the rubric form. He thinks:

ac. sing. of
canis, cani/s M-F
= dog *cani*

ac. sing. *cane/m* = "Someone does something to the dog."

Since this is clearly what the sentence states, he has attained verification. Applying the same method to the verb, he finishes with a Latin sentence in the Latin order, which will make the appropriate sense to Romanus. Of course where the words are familiar, or their declension obvious, there will be much short-circuiting of this process; but the pupil should be held always in readiness to prove that he has the correct forms in his Latin sentences, by resort to the composition project, followed by the inflection project if his analysis has been correct; and he should be encouraged to write every Latin sentence in this way until he acquires the idiomatic feeling for the language.

Now is not this worth striving for, to get our pupil, in everything he does, to have a definite aim of a social nature, to analyze and classify the problem, to specify the method appropriate to solution, to work according to specifications, and to verify results? And if, as we have shown, all these things can be done in Latin with entire fitness to the nature of the subject, have we not as good a right as any of the "practical" studies to claim that our pupils are engaged in intelligent self-activity of an educative nature, and not working blindly by a priori rules? Provided, of course, that we do it!